RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

VOL. 13 NO.10
MAY 1983
ISSUE NO. 268
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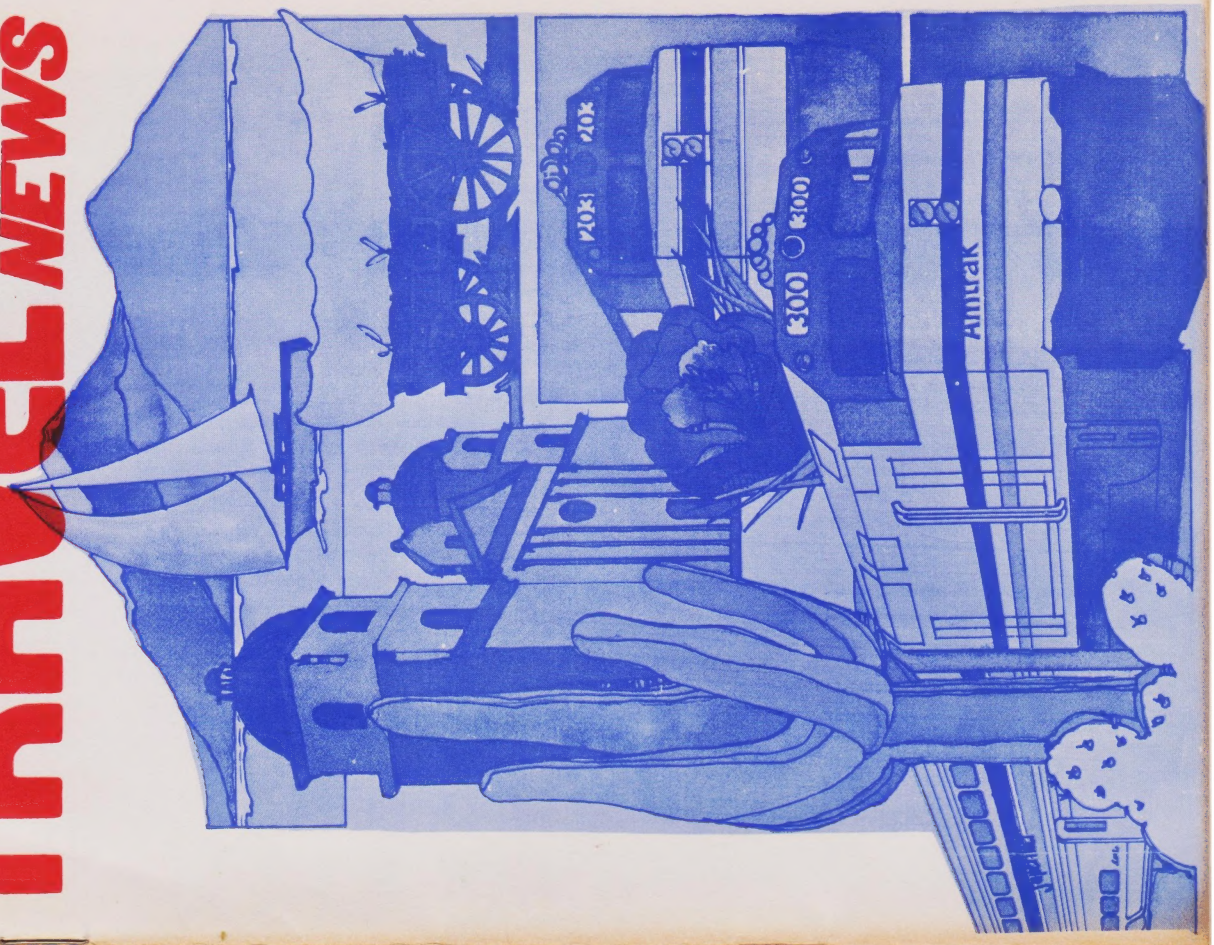

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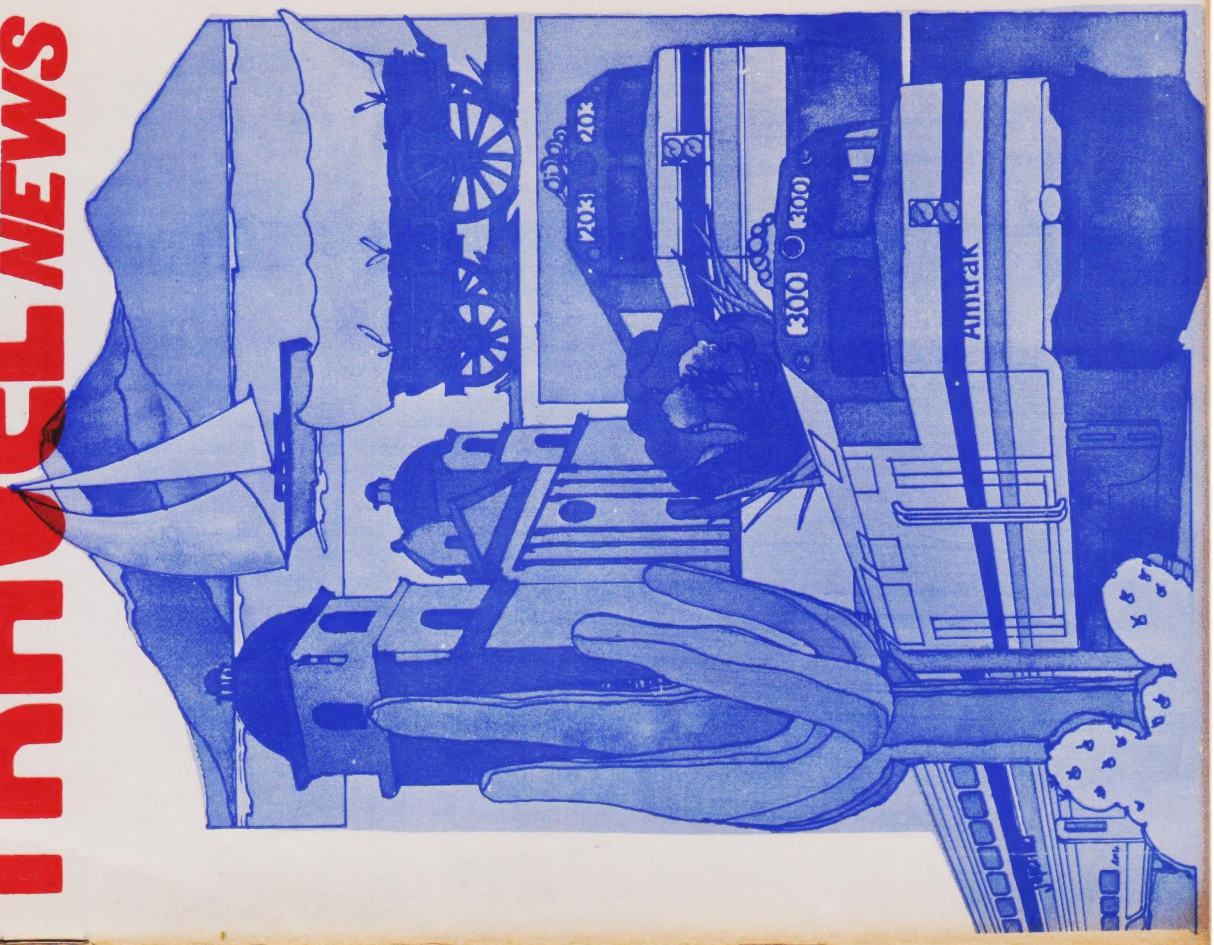

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FIRST CLASS

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Amtrak award

TED AND SYLVIA BLISHAK, OWNERS OF ACCENT ON TRAVEL, HAVE RECEIVED AMTRAK'S GOLDEN SPIKE AWARD FOR PRODUCING MORE RAIL SALES THAN ANY OTHER AGENCY IN THE PENINSULA-SANTA CLARA VALLEY AREA.

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LETTERS

Since its inception, Amtrak has promoted the BROADWAY LIMITED over the LAKE SHO LIMITED. This, in spite of the fact that the LAKE SHORE consistently outdraws the BROADWAY even when the latter had better equipment and extensive promotion. Now, in RTN #266 we read that Graham Claytor says the LAKE SHORE LIMITED is comparable to the CENTURY. Really? My old New York Central timetable shows the CENTURY leaving Chicago at 4:30pm--not 6:20pm. This meant it arrived in Cleveland at approximately 11pm, not 1:49am like today's LAKE SHORE! (Just a couple of years ago it was 11:20pm and just a month ago 12:45am.)

Why is Amtrak doing this? Why did Amtrak give the BROADWAY a Chicago departure time of 4:50pm--the EXACT time the LAKE SHORE departed Chicago until a few weeks a

With just one train a day, Cleveland has only "token" service. At least, let's have a realistic departure time! The BROADWAY now goes eastbound thru Crestline at 11:30pm and the LAKE SHORE thru Cleveland at 1:49am. This is pure stupidity! Which has the better "passenger potential"? Realistically, there should be a Chicago-Cleveland corridor similar to Chicago-Detroit and Chicago-St. Louis. This is, several trains daily in each direction.

Thomas J. Healey
Middleburg Heights, Ohio

(continued on page 22)

Rail Travel News, Vol. 13, No. 10. May, 1983. Whole number 268.
Copyright © 1983 by Message Media. Published twice monthly by Message Media, P. O. Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Subscription $19.00 per year; single copy 80¢. Overseas and institutional rates on request. STAFF: James Russell, Editor. Paul Rayton, Editor-at-Large. Regional Correspondents: Peter Putnam Bretz, Southern California; Jack Ferry, Illinois; Adron Hall, Mississippi; Kenneth Maylath, Maryland; Peter Roehm, Massachusetts.

ON THE COVER

This drawing, symbolic of Western train travel, is taken from Amtrak tour literature. The inclusion of Mission Santa Barbara in the drawing is appropriate, for in this issue Editor Jim Russell tells of a trip to that Southern California city made on Amtrak in late May.

★ PANEL APPROVES $720 MILLION FOR AMTRAK

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation on May 24 voted to allow Amtrak $720 million in FY 1984, more than the $662 million requested by the White House, and more than the $700 million of FY 1983. NARP said that Amtrak will also have available $25 million that was previously earmarked for the Shelbyville line, to make a total of $745 million, if that is the amount finally okayed by the full Congress. The $720 million includes $20 million for the Manhattan Westside Connection (to connect Penn Station with the Empire Service line) and $30 million for the planned Atlantic City service. The Atlantic City money came with what NARP called an unexpected provision--that the money would be made available only if local interests would come up with 50% matching funds. (The Shelbyville money is unspent because the state of Indiana and Conrail agreed to preserve the line without Amtrak's help and to upgrade it to 30mph.)

A few days earlier the same Subcommittee came up with a FY 1983 supplemental funding bill that gives $83 million to Amtrak. The report accompanying the bill required Amtrak to hand $15 million for Cape Cod over to the state of Massachusetts in order to make the state primarily responsible for the project. It also required Amtrak to give top priority to building an intermodal station at East Lansing MI and to refrain from initiating the St. Petersburg bus connection until the House and Senate committees had held hearings on the matter.

★ AMTRAK HAS DINING CAR SERVICE CRISIS; WILL INCREASE STAFF TO SPEED SERVICE

In recent weeks RTN has been inundated with complaints about slow and erratic service in Amtrak dining cars, with waits of from one to two hours between placing a meal order and being served common. In addition, our own experiences duplicate those reported by our readers.

On our southbound trip on the COAST STARLIGHT in late May, reported in this issue, the following occurred in the Superliner diner: Being hungry at 11:30am, we went to the dining car steward and inquired when lunch would be served and whether we would need to make reservations. He said it would start at 1:30 (!) because "a group" had to be fed first (probably the group of kids being accommodated in the deadheading lounge car). He said we would not need reservations--just come at 1:30. We couldn't wait, so we got some (awful) food from the lounge. One of our party waited until 1:30. At 1:25 the following announcement came over the P.A.: "I will now take numbers 1, 2, ..." Our group member went to the diner and was seated without a reservation number. She placed her order, and exactly one hour later the food was brought to the table. All the other diners around her experienced the same problem.

Examples of a few reports in our files: On the LAKE SHORE LIMITED, a 40-min wait to be served a spare rib dinner; crew rude. On the SILVER METEOR, a 2-hour wait to be served dinner; orders all sent to wrong tables; service chaotic. On the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR, a 2-hour wait to be served dinner.

Questioned about these problems, an Amtrak spokesman said they began with the introduction of new menus around May 1, which require more kitchen work, especially at breakfast where there are more choices. Amtrak said it is adding one man to the kitchen staff in an effort to alleviate the problems.

RAIL CANADA

THE ROYAL HUDSON excursion train between North Vancouver and Squamish B.C. began its season May 20, and will run thru Sep 5. Roundtrips are only $10 for adults, $7 for seniors and students, and $5 for children 3 to 11. Tickets must be paid for 48 hours in advance, in Canadian funds only, with no credit cards accepted. A boat-train excursion is also offered, running north from Vancouver by boat and back by train ($34 adults). The number for info is 987-5211 and the address is B.C. Railway, 1311 W. First St, North Vancouver, B.C., V7P 1A7.

VIA TRAIN 46, Toronto-Ottawa, running with LRC equipment, was delayed 6 hours 45 minutes on May 19 due to LRC coach 3348 leaning eight inches. The problem was reported at Oshawa at 6:20pm. There was a long period of buck-passing then, with no one wanting to make a decision on moving or cutting out the car after hours. Finally CN decided to send a car foreman and electrician from Spadina Coach Yards to examine the car. It took them 1½ hours to reach Oshawa, while passengers waited. In another half hour, it was decided to remove the car. Then 1¼ hours later it was discovered that the wrong car was removed. Twenty minutes later the train was underway again. Then car 3323 was found to be leaning eight inches also, and a speed limit of 50mph (30 on curves) was set. Passengers were given free sandwiches and coffee. This sort of thing is "no isolated occurrence," reports an observer. "There is little hope for VIA the way it is run," he laments.

THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE went out to VIA agents via the rail corporation's computer on May 22: "When you are trying to reserve sleeper space on train 14 during the summer, remember that two sleeping cars are being dropped in Moncton, therefore space to Halifax is limited. Try reserving sleepers to Moncton and coach or Daynighter beyond."

THE CANADIAN RAILWAYMAN monthly union newspaper said in its May issue that the fatal crash of the Edmonton-Calgary Dayliner on Mar 23 could have been prevented if CP Rail had followed a Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers request from as far back as 1978 to install an automatic block system on the Red Deer Subdivision. CP Rail had replied to the union that the project did not have high enough priority to fit into its limited maintenance budget. Five people were killed in the VIA Rail crash, including engineer Stewart Tombling. There were nine other people aboard the train, and all required hospitalization. Paul McGee, editor of The Marker, publication of the Alberta Pioneer Railway Association, was aboard the train, and in the March issue wrote a vivid account of the crash. The article was titled "The Saddest Words...'Stuie, are you O.K.?" The title refers to the words of Conductor Charles Johnson in trying to call the fatally-injured Engineer on his radio immediately after the crash. Editor McGee, one of the few people who was able to walk after the crash (he had a broken jaw) made his way outside and summoned help. He credited his survival with his long-standing habit of seating himself near the middle of any vehicle. He concluded his article with: "I am extremely grateful to the Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians of Didsbury, Olds and Airdrie and to the staff of the Calgary General Hospital. Appaling as it may be, NO VIA official or CP Rail official volunteered help or were ever at the hospital!" RTN's report of the accident appeared in issue #264.

THE E&N DAYLINER between Victoria and Courtenay on Vancouver Island is expected to be the next target for abandonment.

EDMONTON-CALGARY SERVICE was to be upgraded according to a recent CTC order. VIA, displeased with the order, asked for a time extension from Apr 1 to May 28, and may seek a new hearing. The fact that the CTC order did not allow the service to be extended to the Edmonton CN station is regarded as a flaw.

CANADIAN RAIL SUPPORTERS look with dismay on the lack of action so far on the following critical matters: Formation of a VIA Rail Canada Act; a new 5-year plan;

new engines for transcontinental service; order for bi-level cars; restoration of Winnipeg-Melville-Saskatoon-Edmonton service and Edmonton-Jasper-Kamloops-Vancouver service.

URBAN-SUBURBAN TRANSIT

LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD announced May 29 that seven more unions had reached contract agreements with it, leaving only four of the original 17 still unsigned.

SAN FRANCISCO CABLE CARS will be back in operation in June, 1984, insist reconstruction project leaders, altho those who see the digging on Powell Street and elsewhere are disbelieving. Many sub-projects are up to a month behind schedule because of long and heavy winter rains. The city has been losing money from tourism with the absence of the cable cars, and to help offset the loss the city will hold a Historic Trolley Festival from Jun 24 to Sep 25, with 10 vintage streetcars running on Market Street daily except Tues and Wed. Cars are expected to be on hand from Melbourne, Australia; Porto, Portugal; Blackpool, England; Portland OR; St. Louis; and New Orleans.

NEW YORK STATE on May 31 passed and sent to the Governor a bill establishing a Public Transportation Safety Board to check on accidents on public transit systems.

THE JFK EXPRESS, New York MTA's 5-year old special subway train serving JFK Airport (see photo below) will have some changes if an MTA proposal of Jun 1 is given final approval by its Board. Instead of an exclusive train with special police officers and a $5 fare, the train would be aimed to appeal to the masses, with a fare of $1.50 and loss of police guards.

SAN DIEGO TROLLEY increased service in May, going to a 15-min headway. Weekdays service is every 15mins 5am-8pm and every 30mins 8-10pm. There are 24 LRV's in service, and rush hour has six 3-car trains. Starting July 1 there will be 7 days per week hourly service from 10pm to 1am on a test basis until October.

The JFK Express

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE on May 24 approved $1.25 billion in mass transit funding, to come from the recently-enacted 5¢ per gallon gasoline tax. The total was more than the $1.1 billion the administration wanted. Of the total, $465 million is for new lines, including $110 million each for Los Angeles and Houston.

LOS ANGELES' TOTAL of $110 million for FY 1984 approved by the House Subcommittee May 24 falls short of the $178 million the city asked for to begin construction of its planned subway. Its competitor, Houston, was given an equal sum. However, 62% of the L.A. system is to be funded by the Federal government, and 50% of the Houston system. L.A. Metro Rail's officials said that $150 million is needed to get started on construction, which involves building the first three stations, at First, Fifth, and Seventh Streets in downtown Los Angeles.

THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE'S figure of $1.25 billion for mass transit was supposed to include $11.775 million for rebuilding San Francisco's cable car system, $26.5 million for new BART cars, and $11 million towards a new BART Daly City yard. It included also $8.3 million towards the San Diego Trolley East Line extension.

VIRGINIA COMMUTER LINES between Manassas and Alexandria and Fredericksburg and Alexandria are being talked up by officials there. More on this later.

DALLAS AREA VOTERS will go to the polls Aug 13 to decide on whether to approve a Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Authority and its mass transit plan.

GLORY AND GRIEF IN MEXICAN RAIL TRAVEL

by Duane W. Roller

Dusk was turning the warm day into a perfumed tropical night as I stood on the platform in Oaxaca, Mexico, at the steps of sleeping car "Neptuno", which had begun life long ago as GN 1163. I was about to begin a five-night odyssey which would take me from the farthest south point accessible by sleeping car in North America across Mexico and the United States to Chicago. NdeM train 112, with engines 9156 and 8103 leading 10 cars, including an operating railway post office car, was about to depart.

I had picked up my ticket the day before, having to wait in line about an hour. Lucky I was traveling first class; the second class window was not to open for two hours, but already the line stretched across the station and out into the street beyond. My total ticket costs, Oaxaca to Ciudad Juarez, three nights in a roomette, would be less than $40.

Now I had boarded "Neptuno" and was ready to depart. The sleeper was easily the most decrepit I had ever seen. Many windows were broken, the interior furnishings were tattered and torn, the water and electricity marginal. The porter stood on the platform and took my ticket but offered no other services as passengers struggled to find their places. Up front, a vast horde of coach passengers, many more than the available seats, crowded into the four segunda and two primera cars. As the night fell, the perfume in the air became more pronounced. I felt like a character in a novel about decadence in the tropics.

Promptly at 6:20pm, we were off. Many segundas were left on the platform, and some made a futile rush after the train. I stood on the back platform as we accelerated after town; soon the flagman plucked at my sleeve. "Piedras," he said. "Ninos con piedras." Not wanting to find out whether children really did throw rocks at the train, I retreated into my roomette, only to find it a chamber of vibrating horrors. Only one light worked, flickering ominously. A small trickle came out of the cold water tap; the hot water and drinking water had given up long ago. There was dust in the air, possibly seeping in from the large break in the window. Obviously, the only thing to do was turn off the light and watch the desert with the aid of the full moon.

The first half hour was across a plain, the western edge of the Valley of Oaxaca, seat of great civilizations of the past. Then we began to climb to the continental divide, around horseshoe curve after horseshoe curve: up, up, up, until finally we passed thru a long cut and were on the Atlantic side. Then it was down for the next two hours, thru Tomellin Gorge, long advertised as one of the scenic heights of the NdeM. Steep, bare sides rose a thousand feet or more, and the rail line twisted and turned, mostly on the east bank of the wide, dry river.

At 9:45pm came the first major stop, Tomellin. We were already 15 minutes down, due to two slow freight meets on the climb up. Off again at 9:59pm, and it was time to try, with a good deal of trepidation, the berth. After great effort I pulled it down, only to be confronted with a pile of rather questionable linen and a rolled-up blanket. Feeling that an inquiry to the porter would be futile, I cautiously made the berth, undressed, and intended to go to sleep.

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We were nearly an hour late. There was no diner, but an elderly woman passed thru selling taco mole; I was tempted, but wisely resisted. Down, down, into the Valley of Mexico we plodded, rarely more than 45mph. At Teotihuacan we lingered in the shadow of the pyramids as we waited for train 99, the daytime express to Veracruz. There we lost another 10 minutes, and terminal delays into Mexico City put in in 86 minutes late at 10:18am. The sleeper was beyond the reach of the high-level platform and on the high side of a curve; it was a full three feet to the ground and no step box. For all I knew, the porter was still in Oaxaca.

Professional interests made a visit to the archaeological museum imperative, but first it was back in line for that night's tickets. Due to the fluctuation of the peso, NdeM will no longer mail tickets, and one must stand in line an hour for each ticket purchased. And the price was 40% more (in pesos) than I had been quoted, but 25% less in dollars. Eventually, however, I possessed a blue pasteboard ticket (identical to Pullman Company tickets of the 1930s) entitling me to roomette 6, car 71, on EL FRONTERIZO that night to Ciudad Juarez. Hopefully this would be a little better ride.

By evening the station was jammed with people. Second-class lines again ran hundreds of feet. Buenavista Station's unique double-decker loading scheme meant that the crowds were limited to the lower level, and I could roam in the relatively spacious first class area. A long line of Pullman conductors (and, yes, they are still Pullman conductors, not sleeping car conductors) was checking tickets on the seven sleeping-car trains departing that evening.

All-Pullman REGIOMONTANO and TAPATIO were loading; between them were the 11 cars of EL FRONTERIZO--behind three engines were an RPO, baggage, four segundas, two primeras, diner "Puerto Madero", and sleepers "Monte Cassino" and "Cruz del Sur." A genial young porter greeted me at the door of "Monte Cassino," helped me with my luggage, and placed me in roomette 6. "Monte Cassino" was in quite respectable shape. I could not find its original identity, but it was a standard 6-6-4 sleeper, the type that was the most common variety in the U.S. in the 1960s. The furnishings had been recently redone, the lights worked, and the only thing lacking was hot water, which was not surprising, since I saw the steam line between engine and cars was not connected.

Departure was at 7:50pm, on time, and we raced (so it seemed) up high-quality track out of the Valley of Mexico. Automatic signalling had been installed since my last trip, and the many meets which in the past had resulted in multi-hour delays were handled efficiently. It was a world apart from the Oaxaca line.

The Pullman conductor had another role as dining car steward, and he welcomed passengers into the diner-lounge which served a variety of good meals. Ever since I first took the train in Mexico 15 years ago, the dining car menus have been identical; only the prices have changed. I chose the carne asada, with soup, dessert, and tea, all for 225 pesos, or less than $2.00. Altho the Melmac service lacked aesthetics, the white linen, attentive if slow service, and tasty, fresh-cooked food were all pleasant, and it was hard to believe this was one of less than a dozen full-service dining cars in North America. Halfway thru dinner the lights failed, but it was easy to hook a line from the sleeper to the rear, and electricity burst forth again.

Lunch time in the dining car of EL FRONTERIZO. Photo by the author.

After dinner I watched the rim of the Valley from the darkness of the roomette. The track had much welded rail, and speeds of 60-70mph. From time to time I could see the grade of the new electric line which was being built in the 1970s. Now construction seems to have stopped, and the embankment is eroding away. Sleep came easily, and this time the linens were undoubtedly fresh.

Just after 1:00am I woke: we were in Irapuato. I raised the shade to see EL TAPATIO glide in alongside us, and sleeper after sleeper passed (there were 17 of them), each with a white-coated porter at its door. I was transported back 15 years to Newton, Kansas, where on the TEXAS CHIEF, if one woke and raised the shade, one might catch a glimpse of the silver splendor of the SUPER CHIEF gliding in alongside.

Morning was gray and rainy. We were halting in a little place called San Juan de Los Lagos, 20 minutes late. The desert was fresh and green, with flowere blooming. Shortly we arrived in Aguascalientes. Here major switching would be performed, and we would meet southbound No. 14, the local to Mexico City, which was already on the adjacent track. In an interesting blend of duties, No. 14's engine became our switcher, detaching the rear sleeper; as well, shuffling among the head end cars also took place, and one of the three power units was detached. We had picked up two express cars at Irapuato, so we left Aguascalientes 20 minutes late with two engines and 12 cars.

The day that followed was a mixture of flat desert and rugged mountain passes. Breakfast in the diner was the first priority. For less than a dollar I had hot cakes,

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By evening the station was jammed with people. Second-class lines again ran hundreds of feet. Buenavista Station's unique double-decker loading scheme meant that the crowds were limited to the lower level, and I could roam in the relatively spacious first class area. A long line of Pullman conductors (and, yes, they are still Pullman conductors, not sleeping car conductors) was checking tickets on the seven sleeping-car trains departing that evening.

All-Pullman REGIOMONTANO and TAPATIO were loading; between them were the 11 cars of EL FRONTERIZO--behind three engines were an RPO, baggage, four segundas, two primeras, diner "Puerto Madero", and sleepers "Monte Cassino" and "Cruz del Sur." A genial young porter greeted me at the door of "Monte Cassino," helped me with my luggage, and placed me in roomette 6. "Monte Cassino" was in quite respectable shape. I could not find its original identity, but it was a standard 6-6-4 sleeper, the type that was the most common variety in the U.S. in the 1960s. The furnishings had been recently redone, the lights worked, and the only thing lacking was hot water, which was not surprising, since I saw the steam line between engine and cars was not connected.

Departure was at 7:50pm, on time, and we raced (so it seemed) up high-quality track out of the Valley of Mexico. Automatic signalling had been installed since my last trip, and the many meets which in the past had resulted in multi-hour delays were handled efficiently. It was a world apart from the Oaxaca line.

The Pullman conductor had another role as dining car steward, and he welcomed passengers into the diner-lounge which served a variety of good meals. Ever since I first took the train in Mexico 15 years ago, the dining car menus have been identical; only the prices have changed. I chose the carne asada, with soup, dessert, and tea, all for 225 pesos, or less than $2.00. Altho the Melmac service lacked aesthetics, the white linen, attentive if slow service, and tasty, fresh-cooked food were all pleasant, and it was hard to believe this was one of less than a dozen full-service dining cars in North America. Halfway thru dinner the lights failed, but it was easy to hook a line from the sleeper to the rear, and electricity burst forth again.

Lunch time in the dining car of EL FRONTERIZO. Photo by the author.

After dinner I watched the rim of the Valley from the darkness of the roomette. The track had much welded rail, and speeds of 60-70mph. From time to time I could see the grade of the new electric line which was being built in the 1970s. Now construction seems to have stopped, and the embankment is eroding away. Sleep came easily, and this time the linens were undoubtedly fresh.

Just after 1:00am I woke: we were in Irapuato. I raised the shade to see EL TAPATIO glide in alongside us, and sleeper after sleeper passed (there were 17 of them), each with a white-coated porter at its door. I was transported back 15 years to Newton, Kansas, where on the TEXAS CHIEF, if one woke and raised the shade, one might catch a glimpse of the silver splendor of the SUPER CHIEF gliding in alongside.

Morning was gray and rainy. We were halting in a little place called San Juan de Los Lagos, 20 minutes late. The desert was fresh and green, with flowere blooming. Shortly we arrived in Aguascalientes. Here major switching would be performed, and we would meet southbound No. 14, the local to Mexico City, which was already on the adjacent track. In an interesting blend of duties, No. 14's engine became our switcher, detaching the rear sleeper; as well, shuffling among the head end cars also took place, and one of the three power units was detached. We had picked up two express cars at Irapuato, so we left Aguascalientes 20 minutes late with two engines and 12 cars.

The day that followed was a mixture of flat desert and rugged mountain passes. Breakfast in the diner was the first priority. For less than a dollar I had hot cakes,

bacon, juice, and tea. Then it was back for a day of scenery: the most scenic point is the climb to the old colonial mining town of Zacatecas, with a great horseshoe curve just before the station. Then at noon was the major junction of Felipe Pescador, where we set out one express car to be attached to the Durango connection. We averaged 15-20minutes late most of the day, but made up the time in late afternoon and arrived Torreon on time.

By dinnertime the lights in the diner had failed completely, so candlelight dinners were in order. The carne asada was gone, but a filete mignon with refried beans was equally tasty and no more costly. A Tecate beer with fresh lime was a welcome companion. Then to bed, only to find that we were now so far north that the lack of heat was sorely noticed. It was in the low 40s outside, and would go lower. All the available blankets were passed out, and I placed my coat over them. Still it was exceedingly cold and sleep did not come easily. We were late again, over half an hour, and I hoped for something later than the scheduled 7:20 am arrival in Juarez, as it would be a long wait for the SUNSET LIMITED. But the knock came at 6:30am--"Una hora, senor," and I raised the shade to see a sight new to me in Mexico: a snow-covered desert.

Arrival was on time to the minute: those waiting on the platform looked like refuges from Siberia, bundling up in all clothing possible to fend off the 26° cold. There was no sign of light on the eastern horizon, but Juarez was bustling in the pre-dawn cold.

A taxi driver took me to the border and I shivered my way across the Rio Grande. U.S. Immigration was sitting frigidly waiting; the officer was glad to chat about the record cold snap that was plaguing all Mexico; I noted that even in Oaxaca it had been only in the 60s. Then it was on to the bus station where I left my luggage (since the railroad station was not open yet, it being only 6:45am MT in El Paso), for the beginning of a long and chilly day.

MT. RAINIER WAITS FOR FUEL by Walt Stringer

Following the Deschutes River excursion I spent a night in Portland OR, and then headed down on Monday morning to the depot about 7:30 to catch the 8am MOUNT RAINIER to Seattle.

As a small group of riders stood in line at 7:55, waiting to board, the station P.A. came on to announce that the train would depart at 8:45, due to a servicing delay. We then boarded and I went to check with the crew, who advised that the engines were nearly out of fuel. Since the units and the majority of the train were from our excursion equipment, it was obvious that someone had failed to service the units during the night. Further, since they hadn't been fueled in Bend, the lead unit was down to 50 gallons, and the second unit had 250. The hoghead said it takes 500 gallons (with the normal 2-3 car train) to get to Seattle. The BN fuel truck was brought in, each unit was put up to 800 gallons, and the passengers could hardly believe that a short, four-hour train ride would be out of fuel.

We left at 8:45, 45 minutes late, and highballed for Seattle, as I reflected on the irony of the pass-the-buck fuel situation. Who would have thought Saturday night that the decision in Bend (see "The Great Deschutes Rail Excursion", page 10) would contribute to a serious delay in regular service two days later, on one of Amtrak's shortest corridor runs.

Before leaving Portland, we saw train 27, the EMPIRE BUILDER Portland section, arrive early with engine 227 and cars 33023, 31012, 34065, and 32002. And we watched mechanical training on F40 engine #218 and coach 34018 in the station.

Our trip to Seattle was smooth, except for major trackwork north of Centralia which caused a minor delay. We passed the PIONEER near Kelso, where two Columbia & Cowlitz Alco C415s were sitting near a big trestle. The STARLIGHT was passed above Tacoma near Puyallup, and Seattle arrival was at 12:32, 42minutes late, with a small load of about 50 riders.

In the Seattle yard I noted four ancient green cars, including an open platform observation reportedly bound for the upcoming Penticton trip in British Columbia.

Food service on the trip was from one of Amtrak's 15 or so converted Superliner coaches--the lower seats are removed to accommodate a snack bar and serving counter. Several dome coaches, reportedly bound for Beech Grove, were south of the coach yard, and domes 9310 and 9354 were in the Seattle station.

During my trip I encountered several Amtrak employees willing to discuss issues of concern. One reported the rumors of having district train service managers, taking over train and engine crews, and taking over Chicago's RTA! Another told of cash control problems, including control procedures and abuse by employees (dining, fare, and stations). Since revenue loss directly affects Amtrak's bottom line, it appears Amtrak has some problems in this area, and they are trying to correct them. It should be noted that any business which has numerous people handling cash will have some problems like this. Another employee told of discipline issues, and the past history of employee hiring practices.

After leaving Seattle's King Street station, I journeyed over to Alaskan Way to enjoy a ride on Metro's Waterfront Trolley.

ALL ABOARD AMTRAK'S REAL PEOPLE EXPRESS
by Kevin J. Gregoire

I arrived at the Pittsfield MA Amtrak station at noon on May 24, about a half-hour before the Amtrak passenger special bearing the Real People Television show was due to arrive (officially announced for 12:25pm). It was sunny and humid, in the mid-70s. There were over 5000 on hand, and the crowd was still growing. By train time the crowd reached about 10,000, and by the time the festivities were over, one police official claimed it had reached over 15,000.

The week before, Amtrak's Regional Director of Passenger Services for the Empire Division, Joe Arcuri, had placed me in charge of the Pittsfield segment of the event with an obscure title of Amtrak Division Rep at Pittsfield. With this "authority" in writing in the form of an Amtrak computer printout about three feet long, I moved thru the crowd to see the security forces. My main purpose was to be a spotter for an Amtrak official on the rear platform of Track Inspection Car 10,000, to stop that car at a designated location.

Chris Cyphers joined me, armed with his railroad frequency scanner to monitor progress of the train. Joe Arcuri in Albany had already told me the train left 5 minutes late at 11:20am. However, at 12:20 the special rounded the curve west of the station, and the crowd went crazy.

The train had to cross over from the eastbound main to the westbound track just west of the platform due to bridge reconstruction east of the station, and this plus the pressing crowd on both sides of the track caused Conrail's senior division engineer George Munger to slow to about one mph on the approach. George put on a show of his own with the F40's headlights, strobe lights and air horns as he progressed past me with F40 353 & 368, a baggage, four sleepers 2900, 2913, 2989, 2980, another baggage with TV tape equipment, press car Amcafe 20033, diner 8504, and track inspection car 10,000, its name and number covered with silver masking tape and "Real People" written in huge red letters on the side. It finally stopped a few feet from where I signalled it to at about 12:30.

A contingent of Amtrak and Real People staffers in bright red jackets with "Real People" in white on their backs and NBC logos in white on their fronts leaped off and formed a human chain around car 10,000, engulfing Chris and me against the car. Amtrak's Chicago Public Relations Director Debbie Marciniak and Real People On-Site Producer Ed Halebian called me over for a quick conference, just as a cannon, set up by Eastover Resort owner George Bisaca of Lenox went off. Some people dove for cover, thinking a locomotive had blown up!

Debbie, Ed, Chris and I huddled together trying to figure out a way to get Skip Stephenson off the rear platform (a stunt had been arranged, to arrest him for telling corny jokes, take him to some stocks, and free him when he agreed to exchange a Real People T-shirt for a Pittsfield T-shirt which he would have to wear) after his arrest and over to the stocks. We agreed the stocks were too distant in the crowd. Instead, the Civil War battle in full uniform between North St. and South St. merchants took place behind the 10,000. Dick Beauchamp and Steve Valenti "arrested" Skip on the rear platform, exchanged T-shirts, and released him. Mayor Charles Smith read a proclamation declaring the day Real People Day, and presented the cast with a key to the city. Then the cannon was fired again.

Debbie and Ed told Chris and me to get back on the train quickly, as we'd be leaving soon. Not wishing to argue an open invitation like this, we scurried into the press car which had an open trap with George Casey, Conrail Conductor, guarding it. Once aboard, we went back thru the diner and into car 10,000 as the cast was bidding farewell to the city at 12:45pm.

Slowly we moved out, with the throng following us towards the bridge. Once the train was under the bridge, the cast was about to come in, but I asked them to stay for a greeting from the east side. Emerging into the light, they were greeted by

(continued on page 14)

THE GREAT DESCHUTES RAIL EXCURSION
by Peter Bretz and Walt Stringer

Saturday, May 14 was the departure from Portland, Oregon of the NRHS's excursion to Bend, Oregon and back, thru the freight-only Deschutes River Canyon.

We were off at 8:32am, two minutes late. We crossed the Steel Bridge and were soon whizzing down Southern Pacific's main line thru the Willamette Valley. We gazed out the window while enjoying the Continental Breakfast provided. Included in the double-occupancy ticket price of $159 was the two-day train trip, this morning's roll and coffee, box lunches both days (contracted for by Amtrak), and the hotel tonight.

The train was undersold, because Superliner cars were used instead of the expected Hi-Level cars which had derailed while being brought north on the COAST STARLIGHT (see RTN 267, page 16). But having the extra room in the higher-capacity Superliners was nice. The weather was gray and threatening, and drops of rain fell as we picked up more passengers at Salem and Albany.

At Eugene we waited for train 14 to discharge passengers and pull out before we pulled in and picked up, among others, J. David Ingles, Managing Editor of Trains Magazine, and his father, John, who is 75 years old but looks 55.

Now the train headed up toward Cascade Summit and into fog and rain and snow. The weather forced cancellation of the two scheduled photo runbys today, but an unscheduled runby at Umli, at Milepost 524 past Odell and Cascade Lakes. There most of the 682 passengers detrained either to take pictures or just to look.

We reached Chemult, where we would join the BN line, at 3:13 in the siding. It took almost an hour to run the engines to the other end of the train and get the BN crew ready to go. Our engineer was now a young woman who had never operated an F-40 before.

The BN line from Chemult to Bend is an unsignalled line with a speed limit of 49mph, and it's mainly flat running thru pine trees. The 67 miles to Bend were covered in jig time with some extra fast running and a 6pm arrival time. Near Bend there are hills and fascinating lava beds for several miles along the right of way. Scanners picked up some lively chatter between the BN Trainmaster and the Amtrak train supervisor, debating whether to fuel and water the train at Bend, which has no passenger facilities. It was finally decided to water with a garden hose but not fuel the train (a bad decision, it turned out later: see Walt Stringer's narrative of the MOUNT RAINIER, elsewhere in this issue).

The operator at Bend said that BN runs at least two heavy freights each way daily to the former WP connection at Bieber, and in fact BN freight 137 with five engines and plenty of tonnage was making a setoff north of the handsome stone depot as we boarded our buses to motels for the night.

After an Italian dinner and a good night's sleep, followed by a crowded breakfast at Denny's next morning, we took a brisk and nippy walk to the Oregon Trunk-BN-UP station. Sitting on an isolated siding in Bend were two SP&S baggage cars and a UP coach, for sale by the city. Our train left at 9:15, and entered block signal territory just above the yard.

Twenty miles up the line at Prineville Junction we glimpsed the track of the City of Prineville Railway, one of the few city-owned railroads in the country. This day saw cold, cloudy weather along the beautiful Deschutes line. Scenery consisted of high plains with occasional towns and high trestles. At Milepost 125.5 we slowed to 10mph (speed limit 35) and crept across the Crooked River Bridge as we viewed the enchanted scene over the 320-foot chasm, with a nice waterfall.

Farther on, at Willow Creek Bridge at the south end of Madras, we stopped for our only photo runby of the day. The train backed out across the monster 1050-foot long steel trestle and then came roaring back over the bridge, whistle blowing. Then we clambered aboard again for a ride thru rolling country to Madras, where there is a nice little Dutch-Colonial type station painted white.

UP runs a tri-weekly local freight from The Dalles to Madras, and BN and UP have reciprocal switching in Bend, Redmond and Madras. North of Madras we descended into the Deschutes River Canyon, a colorful, curving valley with high walls and white water. At South Junction, 67 miles from Bend, we joined the old line of the UP for a while. The UP and the Oregon Trunk once had separate lines on each side of the river. Altho joint track was used on the south part of the route to Bend, further north the UP maintained its own track on the east side of the river. The UP line lasted until 1936. The right of way is quite visible as we ease along (maximum speed is 35mph beside the river. There were many miles of 10mph running, due to slide danger, and we passed the area where several WP engines rolled over last year and were destroyed. BN has several sidings in this wilderness, and even one order station.

The train made one special stop at a trestle where we saw rafters, fishermen and Indian fishing platforms strewn among some huge rocks. The line is inaccessible and well worth seeing. At one point we saw a Volkswagen bus motorcading along the abandoned UP right of way. Soon it was slowed by a herd of cattle that appeared around a bend. When honked at, the cattle tried to move, but only ambled along at cow speeds, not getting out of the way. Both driver and cattle appeared upset and frustrated. After a spate of honking, a large steer turned and faced the bus. It charged, but quickly gave up after once butting the high front wooden bumper.

After a bit, some old boxcars came into view together with a trestle or two. Then, at Milepost 8, a big, long, abandoned rotting wooden trestle that looked like something one would find in Colorado. It was very classic-looking except for a missing section at one end, which caused the roadway to hang precariously in mid-air.

Soon we were at the Columbia River, with the sun shining on it. We skirted the south bank for a couple of miles and looked down on the UP's main line below (the PIONEER came thru there about 45mins ago). At Celilo at 3:15 we crossed the Columbia River on Oregon Trunk's 8-span bridge. We took the west leg of the bridge wye and joined the SP&S line between Wishram and Avery WA, 152 miles from Bend and 220 miles from Chemult.

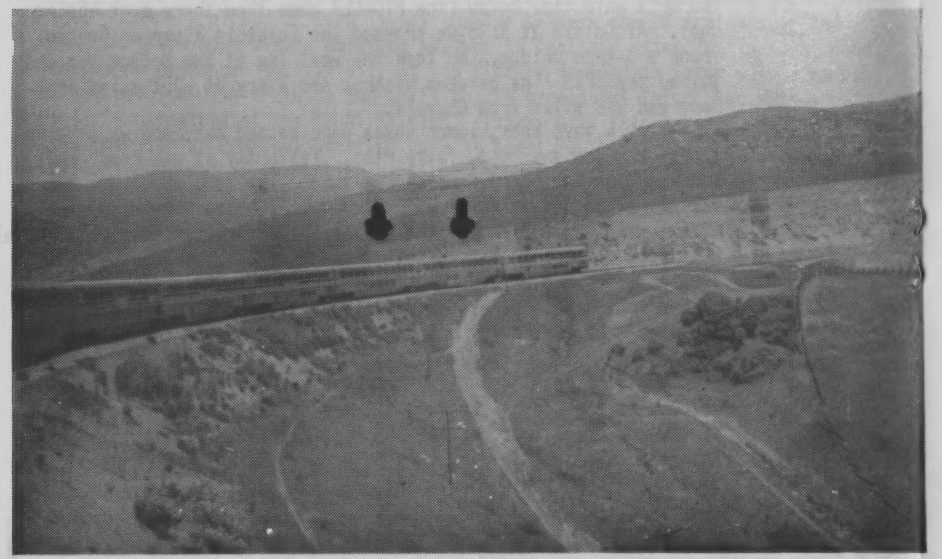
A little ways back, lunch boxes were passed out, and we nibbled greasy chicken and cold, fatty ribs. Yesterday it was roast beef sandwich, potato salad, and carrot cake. The food was o.k., but the Amtrak fare available was better--for a price.

The wind was really howling up the Columbia River, and our special went roaring west to Bingen-White Salmon at 3:45, Vancouver WA at 4:57 (the northbound PIONEER, train 798 on the BN, was held for the connection), and a final arrival at Portland at 5:20 after meeting train 28, the EMPIRE BUILDER's Portland section, on the Willamette Bridge.

After a refreshing two-day trip over exotic and scenic trackage, we came to the end of our run. It was an excellent trip, well-run by the NRHS Pacific Northwest Chapter, Amtrak and the railroads involved. We look forward to NRHS's next outing from Portland to Spokane on the UP via Hinkle this coming October.

CONSIST OF THE SPECIAL EXCURSION TRAIN:
Engines 303, 355; cars 34018, 34039, 31029, 34082, 34012, 33013, 34093, 34068, 31039, 34072, 34014.

The Deschutes River excursion train crosses the Willow Creek Bridge on a photo runby on the second day of the trip. Photo by Peter Putnam Bretz.



Three Sightseer lounge cars on one train! Arrows point to two deadheading lounges near rear of COAST STARLIGHT as it drops down the big horseshoe curve above San Luis Obispo. Photo by Jim Russell.

Along the Coast by Day & Night

JIM RUSSELL

On a late May weekend your editor rode from Oakland to Santa Barbara by day and back by night, to compare Amtrak's two coastal trains, the COAST STARLIGHT and the beleagured SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA.

A short heat wave had just ended, and the famous ocean fog was pouring over the beaches and into the coastal valleys, cooling the air back to normal. We left Oakland Saturday morning on time, aboard a filled and nearly overflowing train. To our surprise, there were three Sightseer lounge cars in the consist. Two of them were deadheading at the rear, and a group of youngsters was being accommodated in one of them. A crew member said the train had been shorted one coach. Another group of 40 kids was to board at Santa Barbara, and the conductor was shaking his head: "I hope 40 people get off by then."

All along the route, the hills were greener than they'd ever been in memory, thanks to the copious rainfall. Wild mustard bloomed in gigantic swatches of yellow where it never had reached before. The fog came and went along the beach, and the blue water was visible about half the time.

We should have brought a bag lunch. The food was poor and the service in the diner was abominable--totally unacceptable (see more on this topic elsewhere in this issue). In beautiful Santa Barbara, however, we were able to do some superb dining in restaurants reviewed the month before in Gourmet magazine.

Our arrival in Santa Barbara was 10 minutes late. We got to the auto rental agency two blocks away in time to get their last car before the 5pm closing time.

Our return to Oakland Sunday night was on train 18 which pulled into Santa Barbara at 10:55. While our southbound trip was in coach, our return was in sleeping car, a bedroom in the middle of car 2996 "Pine Hill", right behind the baggage car. The second sleeper was "Pine Ridge", and there were two Amcoaches. Between the coach and sleeper sections was spliced the food service car, an Amlounge. Amtrak recently assigned Amlounges to this train as a way of upgrading it a bit.

It was pretty easy to sleep in comfortably-riding "Pine Hill." The single engine performed reliably and got us to Oakland five minutes before the scheduled 7:20am. We just went to sleep and got up again, and we never even took time to look in at the Amlounge. The SPIRIT is a very convenient, workhorse train, and we enjoyed our ride on it as well as our scenic run on the STARLIGHT.

Amlounge 28305 behind the sleeping cars on the northbound SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA. The Amlounges, with their pleasant booth seating, are welcome recent additions to this threatened train. Photo by Jim Russell.

REAL PEOPLE EXPRESS (continued from page 9)

hundreds of other well-wishers atop the bridge, construction workers on both sides of the support columns being built, Berkshire Eagle workers hanging out windows on the left and Notre Dame school children lined up along a fence with banners and signs on the right. There was even a large contingent of GE workers on their lunch breaks as we cut thru the huge complex on the east side of the city.

Past North Adams Junction the line rises sharply towards Dalton where a couple hundred were on hand just east of the old depot, which is now a tavern. By now Chris and I moved back into the diner where we shared a pizza (put on at Pittsfield by Pizza Hut) and Cokes with Debbie Marciniak. Debbie was super-enthusiastic about the trip thus far. She couldn't believe the huge turnout of Pittsfield. Sunday, maybe over 35,000 had turned out at Cleveland for the train's arrival plus a fireworks display over Lake Erie. Monday night over 15,000 had turned out at Syracuse. Unfortunately, the train had become dirty due to rain most of the way, and there wasn't time to run it thru the brushless washer at Albany, plus it would have washed off the "Real People" paint.

She said the train helps Amtrak in several ways: First, it lets people know the train station's location by getting them there. Second, it shows them they can travel by train in and out of their city. Third, it shows that Amtrak has nice equipment to ride. Fourth, if Amtrak is good enough for their TV heroes, it's good enough for them to ride.

After our dinner we passed a contingent of people at Hinsdale, then stopped at Washington to allow Sara Purcell and a video crew to walk up to the locomotive to interview engineer George Munger while he drove to Chester. During this time Chris and I moved up to the baggage car to watch the technicians view the videotape of the Pittsfield stop. The shots from the train rear were fantastic, showing a sea of people stretching for miles with the Hilton Hotel tower in the background. Also shown were tapes taken from the side with the train moving, which the crew speeded up to show a speed of about 600mph, almost as if old friend Bill McDonald were the engineer!

At Chester, a tiny village about halfway between Pittsfield and Springfield, a crowd of about 500 were at the depot where we slowed down. A short distance east of there we stopped to allow Sara and her crew to walk back from the locomotive.

Near Huntington, where US 20 parallels the Conrail main for a short distance, we caught up with a chase truck which under state police escort filmed us cruising thru the Westfield River Valley. The run from Woronoco to Westfield under the high Mass. Turnpike Bridge over the Valley then into West Springfield was uneventful.

Going over the Connecticut River Bridge we opened the Dutch doors of the first sleeper (each bedroom had one of the star's names on it) for the approach to Springfield. It was still warm but had clouded up by now as we slowly made our way into the Amtrak station, flanked on each side by a crowd of about 5000. The crowd was for the most part teenagers, with the girls yelling for Skip Stephenson and the boys yelling for Sara Purcell. A few, thinking I was for some strange reason part of the show, started running alongside, but I told them all the show's cast was on the rear car, so they redirected their flight.

I closed the doors and returned to car 10,000 where the action was. The stop was about 15 minutes, and by now we were over a half hour late. While the bedlam was going on outside, I examined the car's interior. The most attractive part was the large living room adjacent to the rear platform, complete with a coach, a portrait of an AEM-7 run, and a speedometer, plus large windows facing both sides and rear. Two side windows were broken, not by the cannon at Pittsfield, but by rock throwers near Amsterdam.

As we left Springfield, we moved into the press car. Conrail Conductor George Casey in full uniform and beard was being videotaped announcing all the train station stops between Syracuse and Washington, so watch for him on TV. I talked with

the show's producer, George Schlatter, who is an avid rail passenger service advocate. George promised me he would keep the Pittsfield segment in his show because of the super-enthusiastic response there, even tho we have no local TV station (usually a consideration in choosing cities to show; for example, Schenectacy's one TV station dumped NBC last year for CBS, and was not even made a stop on the train!).

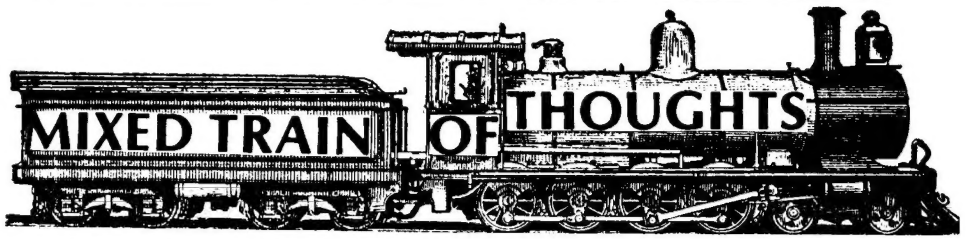
There was a slowdown at Wilbraham (home of Friendly Ice Cream) for an enthusiastic crowd and a huge turnout at Warren organized by Rail Hobby Shop owner Bob Buck, who had called me a week earlier to make sure the train slowed there and took pictures. I had relayed this request to Ed Halebian, who did just that.

By now I had to decide where to detrain. Since the train was 45mins late, there was no way I could go into Boston and catch #449 home, so I decided to bail out at Worcester to avoid a midnight bus ride home from Boston, which would arrive at 4am.

Ed Halebian, whom I'd been working with on the details of this trip since February, presented Chris and myself each with a Real People T-shirt before our departure at Worcester. I promised to plug the show in return, so here goes:

The Chicago-Niagara Falls segment will air on Sep 14 from 8-9:30 Eastern time, and the Niagara Falls-Washington segment will air on Sep 21 8-9:30 on your local NBC-TV affiliate. At Worcester we got off and watched the ceremonies before a crowd of about 2000. After the special left, Chris and I explored the old Worcester Union Station, just sold by Penn Central Properties to a developer who plans to turn it into a shopping mall, and then we walked down to the Providence and Worcester yard where that railroad is running passenger excursions every weekend from here to the Rhode Island or Connecticut state lines, depending on which route is used. For further information call them at (617) 799-4472 or (401) 765-2000.

Our return to Pittsfield was aboard the LAKE SHORE LIMITED, which arrived a half hour late.



THE NORTH STAR has been saved again (have you read this before?). Rail supporter Andy Selden gives us this report: "The Minnesota legislature appropriated approximately $800,000 to provide TWO years' funding for the NORTH STAR. This is the train's FIRST two-year appropriation and is expected to carry the train until the Jan 1985 session of the legislature. The operation will be daily with the summer timetable and weekend-only with the winter timetable (with the possible exception of holiday periods). This pattern was successful last winter, as ridership remained high on a per trip basis and the state's cost dropped by about 50%. It is expected that the Friday schedule will be returned to an evening northbound and overnight, virtually deadhead move southbound, in the winter, as that move appears to have boosted ridership on Fridays. The train will revert to unreserved status in October, as Amtrak quoted a fee of $200,000 for FY 1984 to keep the service on an all-reserved basis. That is outrageously expensive--amounting to $8 to $12 for each reservation call, or $6 to $8 per call for all calls including information calls--and the state refused to pay it. What Amtrak is doing is charging Minnesota its average variable cost for the reservation service, rather than measuring the actual marginal cost to Amtrak of adding the NORTH STAR to its CRO system. This leaves the SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA, should it survive, as the only all-reserved 403-b train. The NORTH STAR continues to operate with Superliner equipment, usually

four cars: a baggage-coach, two long distance coaches and a long distance coach with a snack bar in the lower level. MinnDOT has requested assignment of a lounge car due to the gross inadequacy of the current food service. Use of Superliners presents another example of bizarre management by Amtrak: in summer, those coaches belong on long-haul trains running 4000+ miles a week of revenue service rather than shuttling to Duluth. Also, the NORTH STAR's weekend peak loads have frequently exceeded 500, and the Superliners do not offer sufficient seating to handle anywhere near that. MinnDOT has coordinated a strong local ad campaign jointly funded by Amtrak, MinnDOT and the Duluth Convention and Visitors Bureau. Ads have run in the Minneapolis Star & Tribune and the St. Paul Dispatch, and on local radio. Unlike Amtrak's ads (or ANY airline's ads) the State ads feature a telephone number to make reservations. These ads, and the coming of springtime, have sold out the NORTH STAR on recent weekend trips. It remains to be seen how ridership holds up this summer in the absence of the annual 'last run--going out of business' media publicity".....

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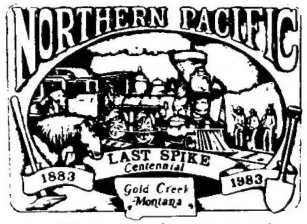

LAST SPIKE CENTENNIAL celebration will be held at Deer Lodge, Montana from August 22-28. The event commemorates the completion of the Northern Pacific line between Portland and St. Paul, finished on Sep 8, 1883. The last spike was driven near Gold Creek MT, in the Deer Lodge Valley of Powell County. NP 154, an 1880's steam locomotive will arrive at Deer Lodge on Aug 23 and will be in daily operation Aug 25-28. There will be daily re-enactments of the final spike ceremony also on those days. For further information contact Last Spike Centennial Committee, Box 149, Deer Lodge MT 59722; phone (406) 846-1004.....

THE IOWA LEGISLATURE on the last day of its session, May 14, approved a $15 million state loan to the Iowa Railway Finance Authority to help shippers obtain the former Rock Island east-west line in the state of Iowa.....

ILLINOIS HOUSE COMMITTEE has approved an appropriation of $500,000 to restore the Chicago-Dubuque BLACK HAWK, discontinued in 1981. If passed, the bill might be vetoed by the Governor, however. Supporters of the train's restoration believe that a proposed connection between the ICG and Milwaukee Road at Genoa IL which would allow the train to serve Elgin, would help patronage.....

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1983'S WEIRD WEATHER has continued to produce rain and thunderstorms in Utah and elsewhere in the Rockies thru the month of May and into the start of June. In addition, hot weather induced fast runoff of heavy snow, causing flooding (the slide that blocked the Rio Grande line at Thistle, Utah in April was an early instance of this continuing problem). The Great Salt Lake continues to be problemmatic, and on the early morning of June 2 the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR, train 6, had to be detoured on the Western Pacific to bypass the SP's line across the lake, as the track was underwater between Saline and Lakeside, and high winds also hampered operations. The DESERT WIND detoured on the Rio Grande from Ogden to Salt Lake City the night of June 1 because of flooding on the Union Pacific in the vicinity of Bountiful, Utah.....

SECOND SUPERLINER SLEEPER with a toilet and coffee pot upstairs was found by reader James Clark on the PIONEER, train 26, on Apr 7. It was car 32002.....

NEW YORK TIMES travel section of May 8 featured articles on "Three Great Trains." The three were the French TGV, the Peking-Moscow Express, and South Africa's BLUE TRAIN. A fourth article, by English-born Quentin Crisp, "Riding With a Stiff Upper Lip", gave the author's feelings about train riding in general.....

THE EMPIRE BUILDER, train 8-24, was fired upon by a high-powered rifle at Edmonds WA at 5:25pm on May 24. The bullet reportedly went thru a window of the rear car, Superliner sleeper 32036. BN and city police were called immediately, but the train had left by the time they arrived. Why didn't the Lexan stop the bullet?.....

"FREQUENT FLYER" MAGAZINE now includes a section on Rail Services in its city reports. The monthly magazine is distributed with the pocket edition of the Official Airline Guide.....

ILLINOIS CENTRAL GULF and Amtrak have signed a new contract effective May 1. Terms of the contract are that commencing Nov 1 performance payments will be made for trains attaining on-time performance of 80% during a month, and penalties assessed against trains with less than 70% on-time performance in a month.....

AMTRAK'S METROLINER SERVICE receives a positive review in an article on the Northeast Corridor in the June issue of Frequent Flyer magazine.....

THE IOWA ASSOCIATION of RR Passengers' June 11 meeting is to take place aboard the eastbound CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR, about 11:30am, after departure from Mt. Pleasant. The meeting was scheduled to permit a trip to the annual Railroad Days celebration in Galesburg IL, where the train arrives at 1pm.....

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION WEEK was held May 15-20. Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole began the week with a May 16 luncheon speech in Washington, following which she went to Washington Union Station to ride Amtrak to Baltimore to inspect the remodling of Baltimore's train station. Also aboard the train were Amtrak's Graham Claytor, other railroad officials, and Sen. Mathias of Maryland. The rest of the week she spent with other modes of transportation.....

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THE INTERNATIONAL LIMITED'S patronage continues to increase, according to reports. Timekeeping and ridership on the Chicago end have not been so good, tho; the Sunday night arrival of #367 is often an hour or more late, both at Lansing and Chicago. It is not well-known that Indian Trails will honor Amtrak tickets on the bus connections from and to East Lansing/Lansing and Flint to Battle Creek. Altho a separate coupon is required, the Amtrak fare is applicable on the bus/trak connection. The connections in the Amtrak timetable are guaranteed. The morning depature from the Lansing area can be from either the Lansing or East Lansing bus station, and the evening arrivals are at either the Lansing bus station or the East Lansing bus or train stations. The same is true of Flint. A much less well-publicized connection exists leaving Lansing at 5pm and East Lansing at 5:15 which connects to the westbound TWILIGHT LIMITED at Battle Creek with a one hour, 20 minute layover at Battle Creek. The latter is also an Indian Trails bus and the joint fare is valid. Kalamazoo is still listed as a bus connection to Grand Rapids, but there is no really good connection anymore since the BLUE WATER LIMITED was terminated. Anyone heading to Grand Rapids is advised to take a bus from Chicago.....

BULLET TRAIN STUDY done for American High Speed Rail by consulting company Arthur D. Little should be released to the public in its entirety, the consulting company said in May. The report now belongs to American High Speed Rail, and so cannot be released by Arthur D. Little. But American High Speed said it would not release the full report because it is "proprietary" and because contractors might increase their prices if they saw the whole report. A Southern California man testifying at State Senate hearings on the project in mid-May gave a copy of the full report to Senators. He argued that the plan would be "a loser" because the consultants overestimated the number of possible riders of the trains.....

BRINGING BACK COAL as a fuel for locomotives is an aim of a joint venture announced May 24. Burlington Northern and Chessie System are teaming up with Babcock and Wilcox/McDermott International and American Coal Enterprises to sponsor a new locomotive that would feature a coal-powered internal combustion engine. The venture is called Coal Oriented Advanced Locomotive Systems (COALS).....

AMTRAK FARE INCREASE of slightly under 3% on the average took effect Jun 1. Amtrak announced the fare rise in a May 23 press release. "The fare increase carries out Amtrak's goal of raising fares periodically to keep pace with inflation. Reservations made prior to the June 1 effective date will be honored at the current (i.e., pre-June 1--Ed.) fares. Sales agents will be able to quote the new fares beginning June 1." The increase does not affect the All Aboard America fare, good for travel between June 1 and Sep 30. The fare increase was not applied equally thruout the Amtrak system. Fares on the BLUE RIDGE went up 6%. There were no increases on the HOOSIER STATE, SUNSET LIMITED, PIONEER, MOUNT RAINIER, MONTREALER north of Springfield, nor in many long-distance city pairs such as Chicago-Denver and Sacramento-Los Angeles.....

TEXAS RAILROAD TRANSPORTATION CO., a venture formed in July 1982, has offered the bankrupt Rock Island $17.5 million for its right of way between Dallas and Houston, for the purpose of installing a high-speed TGV line. The BN has a part interest in the line, and must approve the sale. Texas Railroad evidently plans to leave the existing track in place, however, so BN could still operate on it. The TGV tracks would be built alongside the present rails.....

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MICHIGAN NORTHERN RAILWAY is offering daily passenger trains between Traverse City and Williamsburg from July 1-10. The scenic ride takes 30 minutes, and seven roundtrips per day are run; on July 9 there will be 10 trips. On special dates, not yet announced, this summer trains will run between Cadillac and Mackinaw City. Similarly, this fall there will be runs between Cadillac and Charlevoix.....

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL ROADSHOW to be held in Denver June 11 will feature a 45-min Amtrak excursion train, at nominal charge. On display will be Superliners, Vistadome car, freight cars, etc.....

THE WESTERN PACIFIC was formally merging with the Union Pacific on May 24.....

SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA got a boost in late April when a State Senate budget committee consisting of Senators Alquist, Forar and Beverly voted 3-0 to include funds for another year of financing for the 403-b train in the state budget. The Assembly still must pass the bill and the Governor must sign it. A reader asks us, "Has RTN even asked the question why the SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA is a 403-b train while the indistinguishable East Coast counterpart, the NIGHT OWL, isa Federally funded national system train?" That's a good question.....

LEAVING THE CRESCENT at Charlottesville VA the morning of Apr 17, RTN's Adron Hall noticed none other than entertainer Sissy Spacek and entourage boarding. They had reserved an entire coach from Charlottesville to New York. Apparently they have a country home in the Virginia hills.....

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THE RIO GRANDE is still, as we go to press, aiming for a July 1 opening date for the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR line. There are many differing estimates as to the length of the railroad tunnel being dug at Thistle, Utah. The latest we have seen is 3066 feet. The tunnel is said to be 17 feet wide and 25 feet high. Another 500-foot tunnel is also being dug, to divert water from the railroad in the event that the newly-created lake rises. The railroad is at an elevation of 5200 feet at the tunnel location. Meanwhile, on May 20 Amtrak shut down the seven stations on the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR's present "detour" route thru Wyoming, including Greeley CO. Evanston and Green River WY were locked up physically, but passengers can use the waiting rooms of the others. The Borie station will be opened at train time by a caretaker. Tickets must be purchased by cash aboard the train (or from travel agents), and there is no baggage checking at the affected stations. The Borie bus connection to Cheyenne will continue in operation. The state of Wyoming is still seeking legal means to keep Amtrak within its boundaries. The Colorado Midland Railway is still planning for a startup of passenger service across Wyoming and is seeking local help to persuade UP to let it use its rail lines.....

THREE DOME CARS are now reportedly in service on the CAPITOL LIMITED, so there should be one on every equipment set. More domes were apparently being sent to Beech Grove for HEP conversion (see Cars & Consists, p. 20). Amtrak has now received 145 of its order of 150 Amfleet II cars.....

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS line was disrupted for about a week by flooding in central Mississippi. The line reopened May 25....

Carl Loucks

.... SELLING RAILROAD TIMETABLES

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TRAIN SPEED BILL will not be worked on by the Michigan legislature until after its summer break, but there appears to be little opposition to its passage.....

FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION will hold a public hearing on the petition by Conrail to remove signals from its Pittsburgh-Columbus mainline. Ohio ARP wants the signals left in for its state rail system. Hearing is in Columbus Jun 6.....

THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC has told the ICC that it will re-open the Northwestern Pacific line following a recent slide south of Eureka, until it receives approval for final abandonment, and will keep it in repair in the event a buyer is found.....

AMTRAK AND THE STATES of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama will meet soon to discuss progress towards formation of Mobile-New Orleans passenger service.....

News in this issue is updated thru June 2, 1983.

★ ONE-ENGINED CRESCENT DELAYED AGAIN ★

by Adron Hall

The CRESCENT, train 20, was delayed again on May 14 because its single engine failed, this time at Slidell, Louisiana. This problem has occurred at least three times to our knowledge since Amtrak began cutting off cars and one engine in Atlanta southbound and adding them northbound (see RTN 260). Even if the failure rate is not high, only a few occurrences certainly inconvenience a lot of people; and this at a time when Amtrak is operating the new Metroliner Service from New Haven to Boston with two F-40 engines pulling four cars and a few passengers for 156 miles. The CRESCENT runs 522 miles between New Orleans and Atlanta with its one engine. If this engine malfunctions northbound, passengers all the way to New York are inconvenienced.

The latter was the case on May 14 when the engine's speedometer failed between New Orleans and Slidell. A freight engine was brought out from New Orleans and coupled on. The train then left Slidell one hour, six minutes late. However, the overspeed cutout on the freight engine limited the CRESCENT to 60mph, further delaying it up the line. The next day the train was two hours, 26 minutes late at Wilmington, Delaware. So several hundred passengers (the train was sold out) were inconvenienced for this trip.

It's interesting to note that when Amtrak President Graham Claytor was at Southern Railway he had the eight-car SOUTHERN CRESCENT pulled south of Atlanta by four E-8 engines with a total horsepower of 8800--ample power with several reserve units if one died. Now he sends the 9- to 10-car train across this route with one 3000hp unit, with up to 500 of that horsepower used for head-end power.

Again the question must be asked: how much are these occurrences costing Amtrak compared to having that second engine on the train? How much did Southern charge for that freight engine to run 522 miles--how much did they charge for that crew to bring the engine out from New Orleans?

Maybe it could be summed up in the words of engineer Hubert Etheridge at the controls of train 20 on May 14: "I'm glad Ernest Norris (former Southern Railway president) isn't alive to see this sorry operation!"

CARS & CONSISTS

*SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA, train 15, San Jose May 27: engines 243, 247; cars 1126, 2997 "Pine Ridge", 2996 "Pine Hill", Amlounge 28305, Amcoaches 21875, 21823, 21204, deadheads dome 9465, dome 9457 "Silver Buckle".

*CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, train 58, Rantoul IL May 13: engine 255; cars 1154, 2463, Amfleet II lounge 28021, 4735, 4736, 4015, 4634, 4020, 4620, (on at Carbondale:) 21161, 20000.

EMPIRE BUILDER, train 7, Minneapolis May 17: engines 358, 336; cars 1244, 39906, 34040, 34084, 38013, 33009, 31016*, 32060*, 32029. (*Off at Spokane, to train 27 with engine 225.)

*HUDSON BAY, VIA train 92-94, Churchill, Man., May 14: engines CN 9154 & 9151; VIA steam generators 15440 & 15400; CN reefer car 222626, CN baggage 9097, VIA baggage 9663, coach 5478, coach 5439, cafe-lounge 762, section/bdrm/rmt sleeper 1119 "Ekhart".

RAIL FANTRIPS

Jun 24-26: Pullman Classic: NY Penn-Boston-Albany/Rensselaer (overnite)-NY GCT. Full day in Boston, 2 nites on 1920 Pullman "Clover Colony"; light meals. Berths, Bdrms $215-260. Lehigh Black Diamond Ltd, Box 353, Syracuse NY 13201.

Jul 1: Private Car Sampler: Syracuse-NYon LAKE SHORE with obs "Lehigh Valley 353". Champagne brunch aboard open-platform 1916 car. $75 Syracuse, $50 Albany (one way). David L Ross, 300 Winston Dr, #2020, Cliffside Park NJ 07010. 201-886-1359.

Jun 26: "Piedmont Special" Lynchburg-Alexandria VA one-way ferry run on SR with steam loco 611. Chartered bus to/from Richmond. $39, child $29. Other points avail. Old Dominion Chapter NRHS, PO Box 8583, Richmond VA 23226.

Jul 1-4: Jul 4 Spectacular: NY GCT-Toledo-Dearborn (overnite)-Toledo-Boston-NY Penn Private cars Lehigh Valley 353 & Clover Colony. Berths, staterms, staterm suite $905-1290. David Ross, 300 Winston Dr, #2020, Cliffside Park NJ 07010.201-886-1359.

Jul 2: LV 353 on Train 353: Ann Arbor-Chicago, cars LV 353 & Clover Colony; cocktails, hors d'oeuvres. $90 one-way; return next day $90, or both trips $170. David L. Ross, 300 Winston Dr, #2020, Cliffside Park NJ 07010. 201-886-1359.

Jul 9-10: Golden Triangle: NY-Phila-Washington-Pittsburgh (overnite)-Phila-NY. Cars LV 353 & Clover Colony, dome, Sand Patch Grade & Horseshoe Curve; meals, all beverages. Berths, bedrms, staterms, staterm suite $430-595. See address above.

Jul 17: Richmond Special, Alexandria-Fredericksburg-Richmond VA with N&W 611 & S&A 750 on one-way ferry run. Charter bus from Richmond. $25, child $20. RT incl PALMETTO $31. Old Dominion Chapter NRHS, PO Box 8583, Richmond VA 23226.

Jul 20-24: 1983 convention of National Railway Historical Society, Richmond VA. Includes steam excursions with hot, catered meal on each trip. Convention registration & advance ticket purchase required. Info: Rails to Richmond 1983, PO Box 8583, Richmond VA 23226. Phone (answering machine) 804-741-0706 any hour.

Aug 13 & 14: Special trains on Providence & Worcester RR; lv Worcester MA to explore Eastern CT, Central MA and RI. Diesel train with obs & diner. Info: Mystic Valley Rwy Society Inc, PO Box 32, Mattapan MA 02126; (617) 361-4445.

Aug 13 & 14: Pontiac MI-Montpelier OH daily RTs with GP10s on GT and ex-Nickel-plate 765 on NW freight-only line. Open-air and AC coaches. Fare $37.50. Send SSAE to: 765 Tickets, Bluewater MI Chap NRHS, Box 296, Royal Oak MI 48068.

Send large SASE when responding to listings. One Rail Fantrips listing is free. Send info to: RAIL TRAVEL NEWS, Fantrips Dept, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"So it's vacation time and you're thinking that maybe you ought to do something different this year... Maybe something like taking the train. If that's crossed your mind, if the rhythm of the rails is all you feel, here's a word of advice. Don't. Don't do it unless you like inconvenience. Don't do it unless you enjoy surly people, cramped quarters, constant noise and motion and bathrooms built for midgets. Don't do it unless you're something of a masochist."

--Glenn Rutherford in Louisville Courier-Journal, May (?).

EXPRESS ADS

VIA RAIL CANADA, AMTRAK, EURAIL PASS, 20th CENTURY RAIL TOURS - Tickets and reservations - WE KNOW HOW! One call does it all. Pay by credit card or check. Tickets mailed directly to you. Contact GREAT WESTERN TOURS, masters of rail travel, Sheraton Palace Hotel, Suite 900, San Francisco 94105. (415) 398-2994.

DINING CAR CHINA, glasses, silver, cloth. Timetables, guides, stationery, rules, metal & Pullman items, annual reports. Many railroads. Long 37¢ stamped envelope brings list. J. McClellan, 1752 S. Wichita, Wichita, KS 67213. Will buy items.

June 25 and July 23, 1983. The "Wisconsin Dells Hiawatha". Special 1-day excursion trains chartered by the 20th Century RR Club to the fabulous Wisconsin Dells area over the Milwaukee Road. Note there are two departures of this popular excursion whose consist will include Amfleet coach and cafe service and a first class section featuring domes, diner and observation car. For complete details send a long SASE to: 20th Century RR Club, Dept R, Box A-3258, Chicago IL 60690 or call the 24-hour 20th Century Excursion Hotline at (312) 846-3600.

RAILROAD INFORMATION. 5-7 pages of NEW ENGLAND model railroad shows, railfan days, tourist railroad and rail excursion schedules. Send $3.00 for 4 issues (75¢ for sample issue) to RAILROAD INFORMATION, 77 Horne St., Dover NH 03820.

WANTED: 1 copy of FROM ZEPHYR TO AMTRAK (Prototype Publs) & ZEPHYRS CHIEFS AND OTHER ORPHANS (RPC Publs). R. Pee Jr, 5280 New London Trace, Atlanta GA 30327.

NATIONAL ASS'N OF TIMETABLE COLLECTORS wants you! Annual dues only $15 incl 15 issues + many activities. Tom Coval 21 E Robin Rd Holland PA 18966. Sample free.

Fantastic clear plastic public timetable slip covers. Finest quality. Only $8.99 per 100, 500 for $39. 1000 for $60. Also 55 timetables for only $13, a great bargain. Tom Coval, 21 E. Robin Road, Holland PA 18966.

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GLACIER RAIL HOLIDAY, five summer departure dates, fully escorted all-inclusive tours, using privately owned railroad cars. For additional information, contact Rio Vista Railways, P.O. Box 19992, Los Angeles, Calif. 90019. (213) 231-8442. Pay by check or credit card. Tickets sent to you by certified mail.

I'M COMING TO CALIFORNIA on 8-28-83. I'll be arriving on the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR. I need info on where to stay in or around any AMTRAK point (Truckee-Oakland) for 6 days. Write to: Merlin Marlowe, RR 2-Box 185, Fairfax, MN 55332. Thanx.

"ISSUES IN AMERICAN RAIL TRAVEL", RTN's little book on important problems with America's rail passenger revival, is almost ready for publication. Price will be $4.50, which includes relevant tax & postage. Full details will be given later in RTN. Rail Travel News, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

RTN ADVERTISING RATES: Express Ads cost just $1.00 per line of 80 spaces. Display ads are only $1.25 per square inch. Send your order to: RAIL TRAVEL NEWS, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

LETTERS (continued from page 2)

Amtrak simply does not convey to its advertising agencies comments from the rail traveling public. Amtrak can't compete with People Express airfares Buffalo to NY, but is far cheaper than any plane Buffalo-Albany or Syracuse, etc. Said one skeptic, "I tried Amtrak to Albany and back and it was fine. Fast enough, food and drink okay and reasonable, and the airfare would have been plain robbery." How can the public be told when all we see are pretty pictures, ars gratia artis?

William C. Kessel
Hamburg, New York

In response to Mr. Zullig's question (RTN #264) about Amtrak meets at the Auburndale FL diamond, it is fairly common for northbound and southbound SILVER METEORS (Miami section) to meet there, as the north end of a passing track is just south of the diamond. If the northbound SILVER METEOR (Tampa section) is a few minutes late, it is easily possible for a 3-way meet at the diamond.

Before the HEP trains, when SDP40's and steam heat prevailed, it was fairly common for the southbound SILVER STAR to be late enough to create meets with the Miami section of SILVER METEOR at the Auburndale diamond. I once saw #81, #97 and #98 there simultaneously. And if you count the separating #91 as a separate train, there were four trains there simultaneously.

That last one produced a strange problem for #97 and 98, because #81 had reached the track circuits first and had a green signal on the Tampa route. The SILVER METEORS had to wait for SILVER STAR to separate into sections and clear the diamond --about 20 minutes delay.

Whether this was a dispatcher-caused delay or one of automatic signal operation, I don't know. However, similar situations later on with two trains involved allowed the SILVER STAR to separate while another train passed on the Miami line. SILVER STAR usually gets a red signal at the diamond until separated and ready to proceed. During the 20 minutes or so involved, it is easily possible for a freight or switching operation to proceed on the Miami line.

Robert Clark
Sanford, Florida

Allow me to add my two cents' worth to the switch of Amtrak's #5 & 6 to the D&RGW. If, as Amtrak says, there can be only one line from Denver to Ogden, the Rio Grande is the best way in terms of revenue potential. On the other hand, why does there have to be only one line? Wyoming should keep some kind of passenger service. Either run the PIONEER or DESERT WIND across Wyoming to Denver to connect with the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR, or run a coach train with a dinette from Denver to Salt Lake City.

The possibility of Wyoming losing Amtrak service is both the fault of Amtrak and the state of Wyoming. Amtrak made their intentions known back in 1971 that they would run on the Rio Grande first chance they got. Wyoming had 12 years for a plan of attack to keep Amtrak in their state in the event the Rio Grande line became available to Amtrak. Wyoming blew it by waiting until the last minute to fight the change. The state should now consider 403-b funding.

Amtrak, on the other hand, has been very single-minded about this matter. Wyoming's Governor Ed Herschler is right when he says that Amtrak President W. Graham Claytor has been a little arrogant about the matter. Claytor has said that Amtrak will run over only one line and because that's what he said, that's the way it will be come hell or high water. I think Claytor is doing a great job at Amtrak, but here I think he is very single-minded.

Now that Amtrak will be running on the Union Pacific line until July 1 (possibly longer), maybe Claytor and Herschler can put their differences aside and come up with some kind of agreement to keep Amtrak in Wyoming.

Reader, name withheld
Montana

One trainset added to and coordinated with the PENNSYLVANIAN's present schedule Philadelphia-Pittsburgh and a direct daily service Philadelphia-St. Louis could be realized, with routing via Newark, Urbana, Piqua OH, Muncie, Anderson IN in place of that part of the ex-PRR Panhandle Columbus-Indianapolis segment where Conrail has removed or plans to remove much track. The modern Philadelphia 30th St. Station with its convenient layout including car-floor-level-trackside platforms to station -floor escalators would provide an excellent means of interchange between the eastern terminal of this envisioned "latter-day NATIONAL LIMITED" and the fast, frequent trains serving NE Corridor points. As at present, no need to incur the expense of running this train to and from NY Penn Station/ Sunnyside Yard complex.

Restoration of service Wichita-Oklahoma City and south (RTN 266) sounds like a good idea. If not a whole new LONE STAR, thru cars Chicago-Kansas City off #3 and on #4 at Newton would be acceptable. Or Amtrak might consider thru cars off #3 and on #4 at Kansas City routed Ottawa, Chanute, Bartlesville, the great Tulsa market, thence Oklahoma City and south.

Could not RTN please campaign to help get back the above-mentioned and other needed trains which were removed in the 1979 purge?

Charles S. Wilbur
Adamstown, Maryland

Let me give a hearty "Amen!" to the letter by Blair Denny of Winfield, Kansas (RTN 265) with regard to our state's lack of good passenger rail service.

Those of us who are intimately involved with trying to restore and improve Amtrak train service thru the Sooner State were shocked when Amtrak introduced to us in Jan 1979 its last-minute decision to include the late LONE STAR as a candidate for discontinuance. The shock was even greater as the LONE STAR had, more often than not, the distinction of being one of the top five trains outside the NE Corridor in terms of ridership. (It was second only to the COAST STARLIGHT in terms of ridership in its last September of operation in 1979.) From the beginning of its service as an Amtrak train it was a daily train and ended its operation as a daily train. Furthermore, most of its riders were not merely of the short distance variety, having boarded the train in Chicago and going at least as far as Oklahoma stops.

To suggest that Oklahoma should adopt 403-b arrangements to obtain train service is useless. No other state beside Wyoming has ever been required to do such in order to obtain access to the Amtrak basic system; all other states with 403-b trains have fully federally-funded Amtrak trains as part of the basic system. Oklahoma is among those states in which 403-b is illegal by state constitutional law, and since we pay at least $10 million in federal taxes to Amtrak, why should we be required to pay extra in state taxes in order to regain passenger rail service that is not by nature local? And since at this writing the state treasury is broke, the issue cannot be dismissed as merely academic.

The issue is clear: The LONE STAR should have been spared at least between Chicago and the Fort Worth/Dallas Metroplex where it was strong, certainly no dog of a passenger train. Those among us have the statistical proof of such!

Moreover, there exists the alternative of routing the restored train from Fort Worth to the upper Midwest via both Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Such a train would carry even greater numbers of patrons, gaining much-needed revenue for Amtrak's coffers. It would also gain Amtrak more political support in the person of Congressman James R. Jones, Chairman of the House Budget Committee. (His Congressional District includes much of the Tulsa area.) Amtrak surely could use more legislator-friends in Washington DC at this moment.

In closing I want to thank Ross Capon, Barry Williams, and the rest of the NARP leadership in supporting the Sooner State's cause and saying so in the NARP News. We in Oklahoma would appreciate all the support from all of you who read and enjoy RTN.

Roger Elliott Carter, VP & Director,
Oklahoma Passenger Rail Association
Chickasha, Oklahoma